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FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1256

INFO RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK PRIORITY 6321

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 1490

RUEHUM/AMEMBASSY ULAANBAATAR PRIORITY 1387

RUEHSH/AMCONSUL SHENYANG PRIORITY 3157

RUEHGH/AMCONSUL SHANGHAI PRIORITY 0049

RUEHGZ/AMCONSUL GUANGZHOU PRIORITY 1250

RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU PRIORITY 0070

RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

RHMFIASS/COMUSKOREA FKJA SEOUL KOR PRIORITY

RHMFIASS/COMUSKOREA J2 SEOUL KOR PRIORITY

RHMFIASS/COMUSKOREA J5 SEOUL KOR PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SEOUL 003891

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/13/2016

TAGS: PREF PRUM KTIP KN KS CH

SUBJECT: ASSISTING NORTH KOREANS IN NORTHEAST CHINA: ONE GROUP'S STORY

Classified By: A/POL Brian McFeeters. Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

SUMMARY

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• ¶1. (C) Crossing Borders (protect) is a Christian organization that provides assistance to North Korean migrants and refugees in Yanji, China. American citizen Mike Kim (KIM Sun-jung), approached the Embassy on November 1 to discuss his organization's operations in China. Crossing Borders' Korean-Chinese staff frequently travels into North Korea and produces reports on the situation inside the DPRK. Kim, a Korean-American, shared stories that he heard from North Koreans that passed through his shelters. COMMENT: We are unsure of Kim's motivation for approaching us, and are cautious about the veracity of some of his claims about Crossing Borders' work and the defector stories he recounted. Nonetheless, we believe that his organization could be an important source for information on conditions in North Korea and a worthwhile contact to maintain. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

• CROSSING BORDERS: OPERATIONS

• ¶2. (C) Mike Kim (protect), a Korean-American who has lived in Northeast China for four years, requested a meeting with Poloffs on November 1 to discuss his involvement with Christian-based organization Crossing Borders (protect). Kim first went to China to visit house churches ("basically two or three people praying in someone's home") and witness first-hand the persecution of Christians. During the trip, he learned of the plight of North Korean refugees and was inspired to work on the issue after meeting his first North Korean refugee, a North Korean girl who he thought was seven, when she was in fact 13. Kim moved to China under cover of being an electrician. Fearing discovery by Chinese authorities, he changed his cover to a Taekwondo teacher, as he has no training as an electrician. In an interesting twist, Kim said that he had trained with two North Korean Taekwondo masters in Yanji.

• ¶3. (C) Kim initially focused on helping North Korean refugees seek asylum in third countries. He reported with pride that he was involved in the 2003 incident in Shanghai in which four North Korean teenagers entered the British Consulate. Following Chinese crackdowns and deportations of North Korean refugees after several such high-profile incursions into diplomatic facilities, Kim reported his surprise at hearing

some farmers in Northeast China complain about the Crossing Borders' tactics. These farmers, whose North Korean wives had been deported, argued that, until the profile of the issue was raised through such incidents, North Koreans were able to live relatively undisturbed in Northeast China.

14. (C) Kim reported that most foreign activists who help North Korean refugees in Northeast China do not last long. They are generally arrested and deported within one year. Because Kim wanted to live and work in China for a longer time period, he decided to focus his work on providing assistance to North Korean migrants and refugees and to obtaining information on the situation inside North Korea. Crossing Borders sends ten teams of Korean-Chinese staff in to North Korea each month to gather information about the situation there. These teams report primarily on social, humanitarian, and human rights issues, but occasionally gather information on military issues, Kim said.

15. (C) Crossing Borders also provides humanitarian assistance and religious instruction and materials to North Korean migrants and refugees that pass through its shelters and Churches in Yanji, China, Kim stated. Crossing Borders, he said, no longer helps North Koreans seek asylum elsewhere, but rather helps North Koreans integrate in China or return to North Korea. While the organization allows North Koreans to choose their path, it encourages North Koreans to return to the DPRK and return periodically to China with information and for additional materials. Kim said his organization thinks returning to North Korea is the best solution for North Koreans, who face difficulty integrating elsewhere, and said that Crossing Borders helps them establish business or other means of surviving in North Korea.

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DEFECTOR TESTIMONIES

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16. (C) Kim reported that, based on a survey conducted of the North Koreans that passed through Crossing Borders' shelters and churches, 97 percent of North Korean women are trafficking victims. Kim told of another defector who had been imprisoned in North Korea and reported being used by prison guards for Taekwondo practice. Despite their hardships, Kim said he has been struck by North Koreans' resilience and will to survive.

17. (C) Kim also told us about a former DPRK soldier who recalled watching television footage of U.S. operations in Operation Desert Storm, and many considered that North Korean forces could not compete. The DPRK soldiers were impressed with the superior capabilities of the U.S. military. The military, according to this defector, did not have enough food, and many soldiers were unable to complete their daily exercise routine due to malnutrition. Many were unable to concentrate, Kim said the defector reported, because they spent most of their time thinking of food or sleep. Kim said that many soldiers are reportedly encouraged to steal goods such as alcohol from other North Korean citizens for their commanding officers. Kim described being struck by the defector's description of the North Korean soldiers' mentality, as most soldiers knew that many of them would not survive in a war with the U.S. Kim recounted that the defector told him that if a war broke out, most soldiers would first shoot their commanding officers.

REPORTING INTO A BLACK HOLE

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18. (C) Kim told Poloffs that Crossing Borders' reports are produced and archived within the organization, and not disseminated on a more regular basis. Kim expressed some surprise at USG interest in information collected from North Korean defectors and by Crossing Borders' representatives who travel into North Korea. Kim said that the organization had

struggled between publicizing its information widely, particularly through the media, and keeping its operations and information more discreet. Kim seemed open to Poloffs' suggestions for quiet and confidential channels through which reporting could be shared with the USG, other NGOs, or both.

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